

**The Working of Voluntary Maternity Benefit  
Schemes in Indian Mines, 1921-1942**

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## THE WORKING OF VOLUNTARY MATERNITY BENEFIT SCHEMES IN INDIAN MINES 1921-1942

\*Iftikhar-ul-Awwal

Although women constituted a significant part of the total labour force in the mines of India,<sup>1</sup> yet till the end of First World War almost next to nothing was done to promote their health and welfare. In the absence of welfare legislations and voluntary work, women faced serious hardship and privation especially during the period of their confinement. Not only were they not paid any wages for the period of their absence, very often they lost their jobs and incurred heavy debts to defray the expenses of this critical period of their lives. The International Labour Organization founded at the end of World War I to secure and maintain fair and humane conditions of labour in their very first conference held at Washington in 1919 recommended its member states including India the necessity of providing adequate maternity benefit to their female labour employed in the industrial establishments. The main provisions of the draft convention (stipulated in articles 3 & 4) were : (a) rest periods of six weeks before and after confinement (b) sufficient maintenance for the mother and child including the provision of free attendance

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1. In 1926, for example, out of some 260, 113 workers employed in the mines Subject to the Indian Mines Act, 78, 497 or 30.18 per cent were women. Government of India, *Report of the Labour Investigation Committee* (main report), (Delhi, 1946) p. 24.



by a doctor or a midwife (c) an allowance of half-an-hour twice daily for nursing the child, and (d) security against dismissal on account of absence due to confinement.<sup>2</sup> Ever since the adoption of this convention at Washington, the question of maternity benefit had become a subject of incessant debate and discussion in India both inside and outside the legislature. As it is not possible to study in detail all aspects of the issue in a short paper like this, we intend to limit ourselves to the working of voluntary maternity benefit schemes in the British Indian mines. However, before we go to examine the working of such schemes, it will not be impertinent to throw some light on the background which led to the adoption of voluntary maternity benefit schemes for female labour working in Indian industries. In the following pages, the background is discussed in Section I and the working of the schemes in Section II.

## I

As a participant member to the Washington conference, the Government of India lost no time in opposing the draft convention and explained there that owing to the social customs of the country there had been no occasion to prohibit the employment of women before and after childbirth or to make provision for maternity benefit.<sup>3</sup> The Washington Conference, therefore, supplemented the draft convention by the following resolution: "That the Indian Government be requested to make a study of the question of the employment of women before and after confinement, and of maternity benefit before the next conference."<sup>4</sup>

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2. Proceedings of the Government of Bengal, Commerce Department (Commerce), April 1921, No. 1, Appendix II, pp. 36-37. Henceforth, the Proceedings of the Government of Bengal in the Commerce Department (Commerce) will be referred to as Commerce Proceedings.

3. *Ibid.* p. 7.

4. *Ibid.*



The Government of India indeed did undertake a study of the question in 1920 and accordingly invited the advice and opinions of Local Governments on certain points. Unfortunately, however, the letter addressed to the Local Governments contained "the tentative and provisional views" of the government of India on the various points raised in the letter.<sup>5</sup> In other words, the letter of the Government of India was written in such a form as if it merely wanted a formal confirmation of its own views from the Local Governments rather than anything else. The reply was a foregone conclusion. The Government of Bengal, for example, after having consulted the Bengal Chambers of Commerce wrote back that the Governor in Council was doubtful whether in practice it was possible to regulate the period of absence by any rule, as it was a matter which would be governed by caste and social customs and in which any interference might be resented,<sup>6</sup>

5. *Ibid*, p. 5.

6. See Letter No. 377-I-Com, dated Darjeeling, the 2nd October, 1920 from the Secretary, Government of Bengal, Commerce Department to the Secretary, Government of India, Board of Industries and Munitions in Commerce Proceedings, April 1921, No. 13, p. 79. The Bengal Chamber of Commerce in their reply to the Secretary of the Commerce Department, Government of Bengal hoped that "in submitting their report on the question to the next International Conference, the Government of India will make it clear that it is not yet possible to apply the convention to commercial undertakings in India". The Chamber, however, did not specify any reason as to why it was not possible to apply the convention in India. They rather expressed satisfaction at the prevailing maternity conditions in Bengal and saw no difficulty on the part of the women in retaining their employment after childbirth. They further claimed that although there was no uniformity of practice, women were paid wages or allowances during their absence which needless to say



His Excellency in Council thought further that probably government could not do more than lay down theoretical periods (before and after child-birth), and urge on employers that absence for these periods should be allowed without prejudice to the women's subsequent re-employment.<sup>7</sup> The Governor in Council further doubted if compulsory allowances could be proposed at this early stage.<sup>8</sup>

After having received the opinions of the Local Governments and ascertaining the opinions of the chambers of commerce, employers associations and factory owners independently, the Government of India decided to hold a conference at Simla on May 9, 1921 to prepare a report on maternity benefit to be submitted to the International Labour Office as per its resolution. The outcome of the meeting was also a foregone conclusion. Firstly, the Government of India deliberately avoided including any Indian gentleman or woman either from the trade union leadership or from voluntary associations and organizations. The members were either high ranking provincial or central government officials or Europeans from voluntary organizations.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, at the very outset of the conference it was made clear to the members that Government of India at that stage were not required to ratify this convention but that they should be in position to state the reasons why they could not do so and that as far as possible they should indicate what action they were prepared

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was quite untrue. See for Chamber's letter, *Ibid*, No. 12, p. 73.

7. *Ibid*, No. 13, p. 79.

8. *Ibid*, p. 80.

9. For the list of participants to the Simla Conference see Letter No. L-920, dated Simla, the 26th May, 1921 from the Hon'ble Mr. A. C. Chatterjee, Secretary to the Government of India to the Secretary, Government of Bengal, Commerce Department in Commerce Proceedings, July 1921, No. 38, pp. 113-16.



to take in the direction aimed at in the draft convention.<sup>10</sup> So the conference members, in fact, set there to find out various problems for not being able to implement the provisions of the Washington draft convention on maternity benefits. Nor was it difficult to find out a way. The conference, in the first place, pointed out that compulsory abstinence from work could not under existing conditions be legally enforced. If the attempt were made, women who were refused admittance to regulated factories would easily obtain work in non-regulated factories or in agriculture.<sup>11</sup> Further, employers and inspectors would find it almost impossible to enforce this provision. The existing system of birth registration in India was not sufficiently accurate for the purpose in view. In the second place, the right to prior confinement would be dependent on the production of a medical certificate. Indian women would be most unwilling to obtain such certificates except from women doctors.<sup>12</sup> The small number of qualified women practitioners in India made such a proposal impracticable. In the third place, the opinion of Local Governments was on the whole against the institution of a compulsory levy for the grant of pecuniary help during the period of absence from work due to an advanced stage of pregnancy or confinement.<sup>13</sup> Lastly, it was found that women who absented themselves from their work in consequence of advanced pregnancy or confinement did not find any difficulty in being re-instated when they were fit to resume work, and there was therefore no practical need for legislation in the matter.<sup>14</sup> The deliberations of the Simla conference were subsequently communicated to the Local Governments and they here asked to encourage voluntary system of maternity benefits and the provision of

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10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*



medical aid to industrial workers during the period of Childbirth.<sup>15</sup>

But the question arises : were the difficulties pointed out at Simla so insurmountable as to prevent the introduction of compulsory maternity benefit in India ? The apprehension that women would continue to work immediately preceding and following the six weeks after confinement was preventable. If sufficient allowance could be provided for the healthy maintenance of the mother and the child during this critical period of their lives, it was difficult to believe that women would return to work earlier than the prescribed period. As the Committee of the International Labour Conference so correctly stated : "The main safeguard for due observance is the payment of a maternity benefit which will remove the incentive to a too early return to work".<sup>16</sup> As regards the enforcement of the scheme and that of the registration of births, it was merely an administrative problem. It could have been solved had the government wished so. The allegation that Indian women would be unwilling to obtain medical certificates except from women doctors was also untenable. As N. M. Joshi pointed out, "the hesitation of women to get a certificate from a doctor belonging to another sex is not found in working class women, it is confined to women of other classes of people."<sup>17</sup> Nor was it right that women found on difficulty in being re-instated after confinement as borne out later by the testimony of some of the witnesses before the Whitley Commission.<sup>18</sup> The crux of the problem, therefore, lay somewhere else. The Washington convention had stated that the fund for the healthy maintenance of the mother

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15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Legislative Assembly Debates*, February 3, 1925, vol. v, No. 9, p. 677.

18. See, for example, the oral evidence of Tulsi Chamar and his wife Telasari before the *Royal Commission on Labour in India* vol. V, Part 2, p. 25.



and child were to be provided "out of public funds or by means of a system of insurance, the exact amount of which shall be determined by the competent authority in each country".<sup>19</sup> This meant that the source for financing such a scheme must come either from the Government or the employers or the employed or each contributing a portion of it. But unfortunately for India, it was well-nigh impossible on the part of the workers to contribute even a fraction of wages towards the maintenance of a maternity benefit fund as wages of workers and in particular those of female workers were already too depressed. "If a man gets Rs. 25 per month, a woman in the same place will get about Rs. 15 a month".<sup>20</sup> Hence the government knew that the money must come either from their own purse or from that of the employers or each contributing a portion of it. But due mainly to precarious financial position, the Government of India and the Local Governments were not willing to contribute anything towards the maintenance of a maternity benefit fund.<sup>21</sup> Under the circumstances, they looked towards the employers for the operation of the scheme. Unfortunately, however, they too

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19. See Article No. 3 of the draft convention concerning the employment of women before and after childbirth adopted by the International Labour Conference in the Commerce Proceedings, April 1921, No. 1, Appendix II, pp. 36-37.
  20. *Legislative Assembly Debates*, February 3, 1925, vol. V, No. 9, p. 676.
  21. Iftikhar-ul-Awwal, 'Government and Business Attitude towards Labour Welfare in Bengal: The Maternity Benefit Question'—a paper presented at a seminar held at the Indian Institute of Management from February 29-3 March, 1984. Also, 'Final Memorandum of the Government of Bihar and Orissa' to the *Royal Commission on Labour in India*, Evidence, Vol. IV, Part I, Written Evidence (London, 1930), p. 38.



objected to the taxing of industries for such a purpose which left the government no option but to discard the idea of legislation.<sup>22</sup> One might then ask as to why the government did not then go for coercive legislation. This the Government avoided as it had always a very cordial relationship with the prosperous and influential European community living in India. Further, coercive legislation, the government thought could result in the throwing out of women workers at the very first sign of pregnancy so as to avoid the payment of maternity benefit.<sup>23</sup> Hence the government thought it wiser to enlist the sympathy of the employers so that they might then start voluntary maternity benefit schemes on their own accord. In the words of the Government of India "more would probably be gained by enlisting the sympathy of the management than by passing legislation."<sup>24</sup>

22. See, Letter No. 596-1925, Calcutta, the 5th March, 1925 from the Bengal Chamber of Commerce in the Commerce Proceedings, July 1925, No. 53, pp. 121-23. It is worth pointing out that Mr. Joshi tried his best to convince the employers that the burden upon the industries would not be much. According to his estimate "there are about 500,000 women engaged in the industries which are covered by my Bill... in one year about 10 per cent of these women will be entitled to maternity benefits, that is about 50,000 women in a year... I can estimate the cost of the scheme involved in my Bill at about Rs. 15 lakhs per year... that the rate of increase in the wages of women will not be more than 4 annas per month." But the employers were unwilling to concede to this demand. For Mr. Joshi's pleading see *Legislative Assembly Debates*, February 3, 1925, pp. 675-76.
23. Women workers were earlier systematically dismissed in the provinces where maternity benefit acts came into operation. *Bengal Legislative Assembly Debates*, September 30, 1937, Vol. II, No. 4, p. 2313.
24. Commerce Proceedings, July 1921, No. 38, pp. 113-116.



## II

Thus since 1921 the official policy of the Government of India had been the encouragement of voluntary maternity benefit schemes suited to the varying conditions in each industry. So far as the mining industries are concerned till the end of the 1930's excepting only a handful of colliery companies which had voluntarily adopted some sort of maternity benefit schemes, others ignored it altogether. One of the earliest to adopt was the East India Railway. It claimed to have paid to every woman who had a child an amount of "about Rs. 1-8-0 or Rs. 1-22-0 a week" for a period of eight weeks on condition that the woman was off work and at home during that time.<sup>25</sup> The money was given four weeks before and four weeks after the birth of the child to the woman herself or to her mother or husband.<sup>26</sup> Eastern Coal Company had also a maternity scheme in operation. But the precise nature of the scheme as stated by its Chief Medical Officer, U. P. Chatterjee is, however, not very clear.<sup>27</sup> The Burrakur Coal Company in their statement claimed that for four collieries belonging to this company it had paid an amount of Rs. 1,473 as confinement allowance for 350 cases during the period from January to December, 1928, the average amount per case being a little over Rs. 4-3 annas.<sup>28</sup> Tata Collieries, as stated by the Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee, paid to their workers eight weeks leave on full pay after a

25. *Royal Commission on Labour in India* (henceforth referred to as RCL), Oral Evidence, Vol. IV, Part II (London, 1930), pp. 358-59.

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Ibid.* p. 111. U. P. Chatterjee had stated that "when a woman is five months pregnant, she begins to get 5 annas wages, this she gets till one month after the birth of the child."

28. *Ibid.* Vol. IV, Part I, Written Evidence, p. 37.



minimum of one year's continuous service.<sup>29</sup> In the same report, we also find the mention of Bhagtand Colliery granting leave for two weeks and a fixed allowance of Rs. 4 and Argada Colliery paying one month's full pay to their workers at childbirth.<sup>30</sup> Apart from the above few, we do not come across reference of any others having maternity benefit schemes. In this category falls most of the bigger colliery companies owned and managed by foreigners like Bengal Coal, Seebpore Coal, Katras Jherriah (all managed by Andrew Yule and Company); Equitable, Dhemo Main, West Jamuria, Aldih (managed by Maceneill and Campany); New Beerbhoom managed by Balmer Lawrie and North Damuda managed by Shaw Wallace and Campany. Some of the larger colliery companies owned and managed by the Indians like that of Kirkend Colliery owned by Indra Narayan Chandra and others had also no schemes of maternity benefit.<sup>31</sup> However, a few claimed to have schemes under which a daily payment was given as sick *khorki* while the the woman was off work or a bonus paid for each birth.<sup>32</sup> As regards other mining industries such as mica, managanese, iron ore, etc, it is highly doubtful whether schemes of maternity benefit were

29. *Report of the Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee*, Vol. I, Recommendations (Patna, 1940), p. 61.

30. *Ibid.*

31. *RCL*, Oral Evidence, Vol. IV, Part II, p. 132.

32. The most notable of this was in Giridih. The Colliery Benefit Fund, established in 1892, claimed to have paid Rs. 4-8 for each living birth. Further details of the scheme are, however, not available. See *Commerce Proceedings*, December 1924, No. 49, pp. 37-38 some collieries including Saltore Colliery in Bihar also paid *khorki* as did some other in Bengal. See, *Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee*, p. 61; *RCL*, Vol. IV, Part I, Written Evidence, p. 208 and B. R. Seth, *Labour in the Indian Coal Industry* (Bombay, 1940), p. 163.



in operation in those. The only exception in this category was the Central Provinces Manganese Ore Company. When the company started paying maternity benefit we have no information but it claimed to have paid an amount of Rs. 2,802-2-0 in 1940 in 475 cases, the average amount per case being a little over Rs. 5-14 annas.<sup>33</sup>

Not only were maternity benefit schemes rare in the mining industries, the few which had did not go far enough. In the first place the amount paid as maternity benefit was considered most inadequate. The East India Railway claimed to have paid Rs. 1-8-0 to Rs. 1-12-0 a week which was four annas or so on the average per day. The Burrakur Coal Company paid on the average Rs. 4-3 annas for the entire confinement period while Bhagtand paid a fixed allowance of Rs. 4 only. This amount was not even adequate to cover the basic needs of a woman at subsistence level and if allowance is made on the fact that the needs of a woman for a period before and after delivery is more, the inadequacy of the amount becomes all the more glaring. It is also to be remembered that in the virtual absence of proper medical facilities, it was the universal practice to employ the services of a *dai* at childbirth which cost her anything up to Rs. 5.<sup>34</sup> Equally insufficient was the period of benefit. In view of the nature of the job involved, women at the collieries usually remained absent from work for a period of at least three months before delivery.<sup>35</sup> The Washington conference of 1919 had also recommended six weeks rest period both before and after confinement. Yet none of the mines voluntarily did so. The nearest was the East India Railway and the Tata which paid

33. Government of India, Labour Investigation Committee : *Report on an enquiry into conditions of Labour in the Manganese Mining Industry in India* (by D. V. Rege) (Delhi, 1946), p. 14.

34. RCL, Oral Evidence, Vol. IV, Part II, pp. 134-35.

35. *Ibid.*



to their employees for eight weeks before and after childbirth. Here, too restrictions of various sorts such as a minimum of one year's service, etc, were put before one could enjoy leave with full benefits.<sup>36</sup>

There were also deficiencies (if not exaggerated claims or false claims on the part of the employers) in the disbursement of maternity allowance. Either for want of supervision or defects in the rules itself or due to some other reason not quite clear to us very often the beneficiaries did not get the entire amount of the benefit. Thus, for example, while the East India Railway was claiming to pay Rs. 1-8-0 to Rs. 1-12-0 a week for a period of eight weeks to their women employees at childbirth, in actual practice Gangia Kamin of the Serampore Colliery, Giridih (Run by the E. I. Railway) claimed to have received a consolidated sum of Rs. 4-8 annas only from the hands of the head clerk when her child was born.<sup>37</sup> Again, while the Loyabad colliery claimed to have paid an allowance for three to four weeks at the rate of four annas a day before and six annas a day after childbirth<sup>38</sup> (which should not have been below Rs. 7 for the entire confinement period), in actual practice the average payments of the company on account of maternity benefit was just over Rs. 4.<sup>39</sup> Small payments from annas 8 to Rs. 2 made by a few colliery owners which did not have maternity benefit schemes also not necessarily reached the beneficiaries.<sup>40</sup>

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36. *Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee*, Vol. I, Recommendations, p. 61.

37. *Ibid*, p. 365.

38. *Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee*, Vol. I, p. 61.

39. The Loyabad Colliery belonged to the Burrakur Coal Company. The Company according to their own statement of accounts mentioned earlier paid on an average Rs. 4-3 only.

40. See *RCL*, Vol. IV, Part II, pp. 134-35 where Kirkend Colliery claimed to pay Rs. 1 when a child was born.



If direct maternity benefits were inadequate, the employers were equally callous about the provision of medical facilities of their female employees. Till the end of the 1930's only a handful of larger collieries maintained responsible medical doctors and hospitals centrally situated to their mines.<sup>41</sup> Some of the larger ones like Messrs. Andrew Yule and Company also employed at their collieries certified midwives trained at the Eden Hospital, Calcutta.<sup>42</sup> The vast majority had, however, neither doctors nor midwives of their own. Due to lack of medical facilities, therefore, women preferred to go back to their villages during periods of childbirth. There they fell victims in the hands of indigenous *dais*. "None of the indigenous *dais* appeared to have had any outside training. In no case did they own a pair of scissors, but used the ordinary household knife, or in the country the sickle to be found in each home."<sup>43</sup> Not infrequently, deaths occurred among workers at childbirth.<sup>44</sup> To help mining women at this critical moment of their lives, therefore, the Mines Board of Health-the Asansol Mines Board of Health (for Ranigunj) and the Jharria Mines Board of Health (for Jharria) established by the provincial governments (in 1912 and 1913 respectively) came forward to help them but due to sheer vastness of the mining areas and lack of adequate resources at their command these Boards

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On the other hand, Kolli, a woman worker of the same mine alleged that she received nothing when her baby was born. *Ibid*, p. 138.

41. Although some of the collieries maintained doctors, none of them were females. See B. R. Seth, *Labour in the Indian Coal Industry* (Bombay, 1940), p. xiii.

42. Commerce Proceedings, December 1924, No. 49, pp. 37-38.

43. Bulletin of Indian Industries and Labour, No. 31, *Women's Labour in Bengal Industries* (by Dagmer F. Curjel) Calcutta, 1923), p. 34.

44. *Ibid*.



could not function as efficiently as was desirable.<sup>45</sup>

In the 1930's, however, there seemed to have been a definite improvement in the organization of the Boards.<sup>46</sup> The number of certified midwives was increased and Health Visitors appointed who not only attended childbirths but also advised mothers before and after births. But a lot remained to be done, especially in the Ranigunj area as B. R. Seth so rightly pointed out in his study of colliery labour in India. "The collieries should appoint their own midwives. Six or seven midwives or Health Visitors of the Health Board cannot do the work so effectively as a midwife at a colliery . . . It should be made compulsory for a colliery of a certain size to appoint a midwife."<sup>47</sup> There was also the problem of nursing babies. The problem, as yet universally ignored, needed to be solved through the introduction of the creche system.

But more important than the inadequacy of maternity benefit schemes and defects in its working was the deliberate policy of the employers to reduce the number of women in the coal mines ever since the question began to be discussed and debated seriously in India in the early 1920's. The proportion of women in the coal mines which was increasing till 1920 began to decrease from 1921 onwards. Thus in the year 1920, the percentage of adult female workers was 48.11 and it started coming down gradually till it reached the figure of 11.39 per cent in 1939 (see Table 1). No doubt the principal reason for such wholesale reduction was the result of the government decision to progressively eliminate women from underground work from 1939 onwards but then it becomes difficult for us to account for the pronounced fall in the proportion of women to men for the period from 1921 to 1929. It is most likely, therefore, that the employers had started recruiting more males than females since the early

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45. B. R. Seth, *Labour in the Indian Coal Industry*, pp. 16, 157-162.

46. *Ibid.*

47. *Ibid.*, p. 161,



1920's so as to avoid the payment of compulsory maternity benefit in the future. It would have been interesting also had we had data regarding the age and civil condition of the women workers in the mines for the years prior to the introduction of the principle of voluntary maternity benefit schemes in 1920 and afterwards. It would have allowed us to investigate whether there had been a shift in the preference of the employers towards the employment of unmarried girls, widows and women past child-bearing age or not.

### Conclusion

Women miners in India were probably the most unfortunate victims of capitalist exploitation during British rule in India. In contrast to the contemporary world where women's labour in mines was banned through legislative action,<sup>48</sup> not only were Indian women employed in mines but also dragged underground on the plea of labour shortage. Till 1923, the exploiting capitalists were also able to withhold restrictions relating to hours of work in a day or a week.<sup>49</sup> Nor did they feel the necessity to improve the physical and economic conditions of mining labour which were probably the worst than in any industry of India.<sup>50</sup> Considering such a poor record, it was indeed a small wonder that they would oppose tooth and nail the system of maternity benefit. In their opposition and exploitation of labour, however, they were not alone. The employers were aided all along by the government.

48. Government of India, Labour Investigation Committee : *Report on an enquiry into conditions of labour in the coal mining industry in India* (by S. R. Deshpande) (Delhi, 1946), p. 18. Only three countries of the world employed women workers in coal mines. These were India, Japan and the USSR.

49. B. R. Seth, *Labour in the Indian Coal Industry*, p. 13.

50. Iftikhar-ul-Awwal, *The Industrial Development of Bengal, 1900-1939* (New Delhi, 1982), Chapter 3.



It was the government which had turned down the idea of compulsory maternity benefit schemes time and again at the behest of employers.<sup>51</sup> Nor did the government do anything worthwhile to encourage employers to start voluntary maternity benefit schemes. The result was that, till the end of the 1930's only a few mining companies had started limited maternity benefit schemes; others made no effort in this direction. Seeing the disappointing response on the part of the employers pressure was brought to bear upon the Government of India to pass legislation in this regard.<sup>52</sup> The outcome was the Mines Maternity Benefit Act, 1941 which came into operation on December 28, 1942.<sup>53</sup>

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51. The Government of India opposed N. M. Joshi's Maternity Benefit Bill, 1924 in the Legislative Assembly. The Bihar government also opposed the resolution brought in the Council on August 19, 1926, by Lala Baijnath to take early steps to protect female labour employed in the coalfields and all industrial plants of the province. The Government of Bengal and the Bihar government kept up their opposition for compulsory maternity benefit legislation before the Royal Commission. See Iftikhar-ul-Awwal, 'Government and Business Attitude towards Labour Welfare in Bengal: The Maternity Benefit Question', a paper presented at a seminar in Ahmedabad organized by the Indian Institute of management, Ahmedabad : RCL. Evidence, Vol. IV, Part I. p. 37.

52. Thus in 1939 the Select Committee of the Bengal Legislative Council on the Bengal Maternity Benefit Bill brought to the notice of the Government of India the necessity of similar legislation in respect of mines. At about the same time the Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee also recommended maternity benefit legislation "without delay". The All-India Trade Union Congress also mounted pressure on the Labour Member to the Government of India. See, Government of Bengal, Abstract of Proceedings of the Department of Commerce and Labour (Commerce), B. Proceedings, July 1939, p. 13; *Report of the Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee*, Vol. I. pp. 61-62; and *Labour Gazette*, Vol. XXI, No. 2, October 1941, p. 191.

5,3 *Gazette of India*, 1941, Part I, p. 32,



Table 1

Table 1 : Average number of adult male and female workers employed  
in the coal mines in British India from 1915 to 1944.

Year	Total workers (excluding children)	Males	% of (2) to (1)	Females	% of (4) to (1)
	1	2	3	4	5
1915	146,910	95,433	64.96	51,477	35.04
1916	141,059	90,312	64.02	50,747	35.98
1917	151,415	95,291	62.93	56,124	37.07
1918	173,501	108,428	62.49	65,073	37.51
1919	187,322	115,955	61.90	71,367	38.10
1920	172,696	106,877	61.89	65,819	38.11
1921	186,813	115,982	62.08	70,831	37.92
1922	180,363	115,518	64.05	64,845	35.95
1923	180,051	115,968	64.41	64,083	35.59
1924	184,264	120,674	65.49	63,590	34.51
1925	171,922	113,391	65.95	58,531	34.05
1926	170,620	120,188	70.44	50,432	29.56
1927	165,266	117,820	71.29	47,446	28.71
1928	164,153	114,280	69.62	49,873	30.38
1929	165,696	123,215	74.36	42,481	25.64
1930	169,034	132,155	78.18	36,879	21.82
1931	158,267	125,805	79.49	32,462	20.51
1932	148,553	121,701	81.92	26,852	18.08
1933	144,764	120,923	83.53	23,841	16.47
1934	151,472	128,964	85.14	22,508	14.86
1935	159,233	136,668	85.83	22,565	14.17
1936	162,988	141,586	86.87	21,402	13.13
1937	171,125	148,333	86.68	22,924	13.32
1938	201,206	177,645	88.29	23,561	11.71
1939	201,989	178,985	88.61	23,004	11.39
1940	N. A.	N. A.	—	N. A.	—
1941	212,422	183,677	86.47	28,745	13.53
1942	232,001	200,387	86.37	31,614	13.63

Sources : Department of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics, India : *Indian Coal Statistics, 1939* (Delhi, 1941) p. 56, and Government of India : *Report on an Enquiry into Condition of Labour in the Coal Mining Industry in India* (by S. R. Deshpande) (Delhi, 1946), pp. 18-19.